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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001466

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/PPD (DBENZE, PAGNEW); INR/R/MR; INR/NESA,
RRU-NEA; NEA/ARP; NEA/RA; PA; R; DRL;
LONDON FOR VAN DE VATE
DUBAI FOR SHELL-SMITH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KDEM KMDR KPAQ PHUM PREL SA

SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION ON SECRETARY CLINTON'S STATEMENTS ON SETTLEMENTS

REF: RIYADH 1423

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¶1. (U) Summary: Editorial comments have criticized the Secretary for what they view as a reversal of the U.S. position with her statements in Israel. Editorial comments have yet to surface regarding her statements made in Marrakech, other than those noting her attempts to "soften" her previous statements as she prepared to face Arab Foreign Ministers in Morocco. Broadcast coverage on Saudi television has been limited. End summary.

¶2. (U) Key Headlines:

--Al-Hayat (front page): "Arab and American moves to Save the Peace Process. Clinton Has Softened Her Tune Regarding Settlements."

--Al-Riyadh (inside page): "Clinton Has Confirmed the American Opposition to Expansion of Settlements, No Change. Hillary in Marrakech: Netanyahu's Offer to Restrict Settlement Is Less Than Our Wish, But Will Have An Important Effect on Peace."

--Al-Madina (inside page): "Clinton: Our Position, Which Opposes Israeli Settlements, Has Not Changed."

--Asharq Al-Awsat (front page): "Clinton Moves Away in Marrakech: What Israel Has Offered Is Less Than Our Expectations."

--Arab News (front page): "Clinton Moderates Statement on Settlements."

--Saudi Gazette (front page): Clinton Faces Arab Ministers after Backing Israel."

¶3. (U) Editorials (chronological from latest):

--Influential Al-Riyadh asked in their headline (11/03), "Has Obama Failed in his First Test?" The paper editorialized, "Let's adopt a single position by restoring the issue of peace to the principle of 'land for peace' and halting settlement activities as a firm position in any peace equation. Let's also, just once, test our power, which was diminished and has become just a sound without an echo, even regarding the basics of our major issues...The battle, according to current proposals, is lost with America and Israel as well. But, we can make our position firm and continue public relations with the superpower without breaking off relations or declaring diplomatic wars...no harm

to put off the negotiations for a year or two if they will yield more benefits."

--Makkah-based conservative Al-Nadwa (11/03), in an editorial entitled, "In Order not to Reward Netanyahu on his Crimes," urged, "Our brothers in the Palestinian Authority look forward to a strong Arab position to back their position in regard to linking negotiations with Israel with freezing settlements policy...In order for the Arab's absence in supporting the Palestinians not to persist, our brothers the Palestinians look forward to an emergency meeting for Arab foreign ministers to carefully deliberate the issue in light of the American shift, which Hillary Clinton expressed."

--Conservative Al-Nadwa opined (11/02), "It is regrettable that U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, announced that Israel had presented unprecedented concessions in order to move forward negotiations with the Palestinians...Clinton's statement, regrettably, departs from the declared U.S. president's policy...In reality, Israel has not presented anything, but Clinton's statement indicates a big change in the U.S. policy toward the region, a change that almost endorses the same policies of the previous administration under the leadership of Bush...The Arab nation must send a strong message through an emergency meeting, which confirms that peace will not be completed with the existence of the settlements policy, which was deplored by all, including President Obama."

--Al-Watan editorialized (11/02), "Is the acknowledgment by U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, that her mission in the Middle East has collapsed, indicative of unwillingness by the U.S. administration to pursue policies announced by President Obama regarding the Middle East?"

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--An editorial in Al-Madina stated (11/02), "President Obama's address from Cairo University to the Muslim world is, regrettably, fading away. The ray of hope the speech gave to Arabs and Muslims is vanishing as well. The current U.S. administration understands that the most dangerous threat the world could face comes from hopeless people, desperate from a long absence of justice. If there were any advice to Obama's administration and to Secretary Clinton it would be 'Do not let desperate people write history with their blood and the blood of others.'"

--English language daily Arab news editorialized (11/02), "By refraining from exercising any level of pressure on Tel Aviv to halt settlements, Washington has, in effect, approved this policy, leaving Palestinian negotiators with nothing to discuss in any future peace talks. This is bound to create another wave of tension amongst Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza...It is Clinton's turn these days. With regard to Israeli settlements, her expressed goal is to 'narrow the gap to a sufficient degree' so both sides can agree to resume negotiations. If she cannot fare any better than Obama and Mitchell, then at least she should try to make sure things don't slide backward. But her unabashed alliance with Netanyahu over the settlements widens the gap further and creates a more precipitous slide."

¶4. (U) Comments from the Websites:

Al-Riyadh (11/02)

Saleh Rasheed Ibrahim stated, "Palestine is on the doors of victory and Clinton's bias towards Israel is only a tactic in a battle to gain her votes for the future - the final word will be for the president. Palestine's history will be read by future generations as the crusades were."

Dr. Hashem Al Falali said, "Palestine still leads a troubled path for peace, not by its own fault - there are people conspiring to create an impossible situation for peace and

stability in a zone that has suffered occupation, war, property theft, and many other tragedies."

Al Watan (11/03)

Dr. Hashem Al-Falali stated, "This area has reached such a level of stagnation in the peace process and all efforts have gone to the wind. The Arab claims have not been listened to by either Israel - the other part of the Arab-Israeli conflict - nor by major nations that can put pressure on Israel to go back to peace negotiations and commit to all charters and covenants.

Khaled Al Hafeer encouraged condemnation in response to the article, saying, "We will continue condemnation and denunciation with all our might in spite of the Americans and Israelis. Continue condemnation for there is nothing new."

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